



HOUSTON
HOUSING AUTHORITY

Transforming Lives & Communities

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Board of Commissioners: LaRence Snowden, *Chair* | Kristy Kirkendoll, *Vice Chair* | Max Miller | Stephanie Ballard | Andrea Cooksey | Guillermo Hernandez | Kris Thomas

April 28, 2021

Honorable Representative Philip Cortez
Chairman
Committee on Urban Affairs
House of Representatives
State of Texas
Post Office Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

RE: SB 591 + HB 1604

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Providing housing for more than 60,000 residents, the Houston Housing Authority is one of our nation's largest and most respected housing authorities. Our Authority's portfolio includes more than 10,000 apartment homes. We also manage more than 18,000 housing choice vouchers. It is with great pride that I serve as chairman of the Authority's board of commissioners.

On behalf of the Houston Housing Authority, I am writing in opposition to SB 591 and HB 1604 as currently drafted.

If enacted this legislation would strip our Authority of a tool that has been transformative to our ability to provide the residents we serve with high-quality, affordable housing opportunities throughout our entire city.

In partnership with highly respected firms and individuals --- many community leaders --- our Authority has added more than 6,000 apartment homes to our portfolio over the past 2 ½ years. But for one instance, these acquisitions and new development funded using entirely private capital; debt and equity provided entirely by our partners.

In total, Chapter 303 of the Texas Local Government Code has allowed our Authority to attract the investment of more than \$1 billion in private capital to provide affordable housing in and around the City of Houston. This is extraordinary. It is unprecedented.

I invite you and your fellow committee members to visit our website, www.housingforhouston.com. I am confident you will find confirmation that my fellow commissioners and I are very mindful that we are not only stewards of the public trust but, in this instance, stewards of public funds including ensuring a commensurate public benefit is received for the property tax exemption our Authority is entitled to.

Please be assured our Authority welcomes input and constructive criticism. Over the past months, input from elected officials, respected community leaders, housing advocates, and especially Professor Way and her team at the University of Texas School of Law, has been impactful as to how our Authority engages this valuable tool. That impact is recognizable as our Authority has incorporated many of the progressive and inclusive recommendations from Professor Way's report into its most recent agreements.

But, the passage of SB 591 – HB 1604 will bring a halt to our progress. As drafted, our Authority will no longer be able to make high quality acquisitions in high opportunity areas.

Recent and pending acquisitions include communities in Memorial, Montrose, River Oaks, and Tanglewood. If this legislation had been enacted in the last session, these apartment communities would not be a part of our portfolio. The homes they provide to families often earning less than 60% of the Area Median Income and whose children can, for example, attend highly-rated schools in the Katy Independent School District, would not be affordable to them.

I regret not being able to appear before your Committee today. I am, however, pleased to meet either virtually or in person with you and your other committee members later this week or early next week; hopefully prior to your voting on this proposed legislation.

On behalf of our Authority and myself, thank you for your service. And, thank you for your thoughtful consideration as to how this legislation will affect the families, especially children, we serve.

Sincerely,

Houston Housing Authority

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "LaRence Snowden".

LaRence Snowden

Chairman

Board of Commissioners

cc: The Honorable Jim Murphy
State of Texas
Post Office Box 2910
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Austin, Texas 78768

The Honorable Paul Bettencourt
State of Texas
Post Office Box 12068
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